

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 728

SP 041 132

TITLE Beyond Testing: Assessment for Teaching and Learning. Viewpoints. [Booklet and Audio Compact Discs].

INSTITUTION North Central Regional Educational Lab., Naperville, IL.

SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.

PUB DATE 2002-00-00

NOTE 37p.; Audio Compact Discs are not available from ERIC.

CONTRACT ED-01-CO-0011

AVAILABLE FROM North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1120 East Diehl Road, Suite 200, Naperville, IL 60563-1486. Tel: 630-649-6500; Tel: 800-356-2735 ext. 6543 (Toll Free); e-mail: info@ncrel.org; Web site: <http://www.ncrel.org>.

PUB TYPE Non-Print Media (100) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Accountability; Educational Improvement; Educational Legislation; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; Federal Government; Federal Legislation; Government Role; High Stakes Tests; Standardized Tests; *Student Evaluation

IDENTIFIERS *No Child Left Behind Act 2001

ABSTRACT

This multimedia package, which contains two audio CDs and a short informative booklet, examines the use of assessment to improve teaching and learning. The booklet contains the essay "Assessment-Driven Reform: A Leadership Approach" (Rhett L. Detrich with Ed Janus and Sabrina W. M. Laine). It discusses the increasing importance of testing and assessment in school improvement and the federal government's role in setting standards for measuring student performance, noting implications for local education leaders. The CDs provide interviews with education professionals who are experts on issues of testing and assessment. Interviews address federal accountability through the No Child Left Behind Act, the changing role of assessment at the district and school level, and strategies for putting teachers back in the picture in order to use a more intimate understanding of student learning to guide and measure improvement. Interviewees include Marcie Dianda, National Education Association; Sandra Feldman, American Federation of Teachers; James Pellegrino, University of Illinois at Chicago; Andrew Porter, Wisconsin Center on Education Research; Art Coleman, Nixon and Peabody; Jean Johnson, Public Agenda; Brad Duggan, National Center for Educational Accountability; Eliot Asp, Douglas County School District, Colorado; Peter Robertson, Cleveland Municipal Public Schools; Jay Matthews, The Washington Post; Jack Jennings, Center on Education Policy; Martha Thurlow, Center on Educational Outcomes; and Ted Stilwell, Iowa Department of Education. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

Beyond Testing: Assessment for Teaching and Learning

Viewpoints

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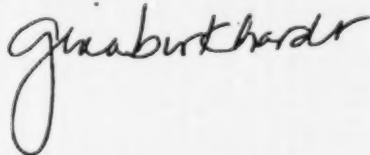
The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in January 2002 created a renewed focus on the issue of using testing and assessment as a means of measuring how well schools and districts are ensuring that all students learn to high standards of excellence. Administering tests to K-12 students as a summative measure is not a new phenomenon. But NCLB increases the role of the federal government in establishing academic standards, using assessment and testing to determine success and failure, and holding schools accountable for results.

NCREL offers this edition of Viewpoints, "Beyond Testing: Assessment for Teaching and Learning," as a resource for educators, policymakers, and others striving to understand the variety of perspectives and opinions that surround this topic. The information provided will help you make informed decisions about aligning teaching and learning to increase your school or district's capacity to respond to external accountability.

tradition of bringing the research base of critical policy issues to districts, schools, and classrooms, and presenting a variety of perspectives on the issue—perspectives representing federal, state, and local interests in both policy and practice. You'll hear real stories from the field about what's working and what's not to help you guide your thinking in education reform.

I hope you find this edition of Viewpoints to be a valuable resource. For more information about other NCREL resources, please visit our Web site at www.ncrel.org or contact us at info@ncrel.org or (800) 356-2735.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gina Burkhardt".

Gina Burkhardt
Executive Director

NCREL

Viewpoints

**Beyond Testing:
Assessment for
Teaching and Learning**

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A Print and Audio Resource for Education Leaders

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The No Child Left Behind Act has reemphasized the federal government's emerging role in ensuring achievement for all students, with high-stakes testing at the core of education reform. Establishing ways to use the raw data provided by test scores to benchmark student progress, measuring that progress against established standards, and using it to guide decisions about instructional programming are only a few of the issues addressed by a wide variety of experts in this multimedia presentation.

CD 1

Track

1. Introduction
2. Marcie Dianda, National Education Association
3. Sandra Feldman, American Federation of Teachers
4. James Pellegrino, University of Illinois at Chicago
5. Andrew Porter, Wisconsin Center on Education Research
6. Art Coleman, Nixon and Peabody
7. Jean Johnson, Public Agenda

CD 2

Track

1. Brad Duggan, National Center for Educational Accountability
2. Eliot Asp, Douglas County School District, Colorado
3. Peter Robertson, Cleveland Municipal Public Schools
4. Jay Mathews, *The Washington Post*
5. Jack Jennings, Center on Education Policy
6. Martha Thurlow, Center on Educational Outcomes
7. Ted Stilwell, Iowa Department of Education

A transcript of the audio portion of this product is available upon request. Call 800-856-2735, ext. 6543.

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Acknowledgments

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Sabrina Laine, Associate Director
Christopher Otto, Director of Communications
Ed Janus, Audio Production
Jan Gahala, Editor
Jeff Kreml, Graphic Designer

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This work was produced in whole or in part with funds from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under contract number ED-01-CO-0011. The content does not necessarily reflect the policy or position of OERI or the Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the federal government.

Beyond Testing: Assessment for Teaching and Learning

Viewpoints is a multimedia package containing two audio CDs and a short informative booklet. This volume of *Viewpoints* focuses on the use of assessment to improve teaching and learning in schools.

The CDs provide the voices, or viewpoints, of a highly respected group of education professionals who are well versed in the issues of testing and assessment. These interviews—from the president of the American Federation of Teachers to the cochair of the National Research Council's Committee on the Foundations of Assessment to a highly regarded education writer at *The Washington Post*—represent many perspectives and opinions that surround this timely topic.

The booklet complements the interviews with research about the increasing importance of testing and assessment in school improvement. It also includes information on the federal government's role in setting standards for measuring student performance and the implications for local education leaders.

President Bush's signing of the No Child Left Behind Act in January 2002 reemphasized the federal government's emerging role in ensuring achievement for all students, with high-stakes testing at its core. This legislation has created challenges for local education leaders, schools, and teachers who are mandated to move forward with the implementation of a system of accountability, standards, and assessment in the schools.

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Annual testing can be more than an indicator of success or failure, however. It can be a tool in an entire assessment system that serves as a catalyst for educational change. Devising ways to use the raw data provided by test scores to benchmark student progress, measuring progress against established standards, and using that assessment to guide the decisions about instructional programming are just a few of the challenges that lie before the nation's educators.

The Booklet: A Guide to Contents

The essay "Assessment-Driven Reform: A Leadership Approach" serves as a companion to the CDs. The essay provides relevant, timely information for local education leaders on the evolving mandate of assessment in education. It examines the role of assessment in the recent No Child Left Behind Act and considers implications for education leaders who will need to address this legislation. Strategies are provided for moving beyond a single emphasis on high-stakes testing and for reconsidering educational assessment as a means to support improvements in instruction and student performance. (It may be helpful to read the booklet as an introduction to the topic before listening to the interviews presented on the CDs.)

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Outlines the growing role of assessment in state and federal accountability policy.

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Offers five key strategies for local education leaders as well as examples of tools and practices that might assist with the transformation.

Conclusion 19

Provides a reminder that annual testing can be a catalyst for school improvement.

Audio CDs: A Guide to Contents

The CDs provide various perspectives on the issue of assessment. These interviews address the new federal accountability, the changing role of assessment at the district and school, and strategies for putting teachers back into the picture so that a more intimate understanding of a student's learning can be used to guide and measure improvement.

CD 1 – Interviews (in order of appearance)

1. Introduction
2. Marcie Dianda is a senior policy analyst and program consultant at the National Education Association and a member of the Commission on Instructionally Supportive Assessment.
3. Sandra Feldman is president of the American Federation of Teachers.
4. James Pellegrino is professor of psychology and education at the University of Illinois at Chicago and cochair of the National Research Council's Committee on the Foundations of Assessment.



5. Andrew Porter is director of the Wisconsin Center on Education Research and a frequent advisor to policymakers on test validity.
6. Art Coleman is a former deputy assistant secretary for the Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education. He currently is a partner with Nixon and Peabody.
7. Jean Johnson is president of Public Agenda.

CD 2 – Interviews (in order of appearance)



1. Brad Duggan is interim president of the National Center for Educational Accountability.
2. Eliot Asp is assistant superintendent for research and assessment, Douglas County School District, Colorado.
3. Peter Robertson is executive director, Office of Research and Evaluation, Cleveland Municipal Public Schools.
4. Jay Mathews is an education writer for *The Washington Post*.
5. Jack Jennings is president of the Center on Education Policy.

6. Martha Thurlow is director of the National Center on Educational Outcomes.
7. Ted Stilwill is director of the Iowa Department of Education.

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Assessment-Driven Reform: A Leadership Approach

By Rhetta L. Detrich

with Ed Janus and Sabrina W.M. Laine

Introduction

It has been nearly 20 years since *A Nation at Risk* shined the spotlight on the “rising tide of mediocrity” in American education. This report, released in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, served as a call to arms for education, political, and community leaders. Educators were accused of permitting a mediocre standard of education “that threatens our very future as a nation and a people” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5). With the publication of this report, establishing educational standards of achievement for all students quickly became an issue of national policy.

After standards were developed in most states, attention was given to developing systems for determining progress in the quest to meet those standards. The

primary device for measuring such progress—or lack thereof—has been student testing. Today, nearly every state in the nation has developed or uses a form of state assessment to determine students' educational progress.

The profound growth of the testing industry is a clear indication that testing is a permanently established fixture in American education. Using data from *The Bowker Annual*, a compendium of annual test sales, the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy at Boston College reported a jump in test sales from \$7 million in 1995 to \$263 million in 1997; the estimated value of today's testing market ranges from \$400 million to \$700 million (WGBH Educational Foundation, 2002b).

The increasing role of testing in U.S. schools is a reflection of the growing federal emphasis on shaping an education agenda that centers around standards and accountability. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the accountability-based reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Today, nearly every state in the nation has a form of state assessment to determine students' educational progress

The No Child Left Behind Act and Assessment

The No Child Left Behind Act, signed by President Bush on January 8, 2002, has significantly increased the federal government's role in accountability over that imposed by the 1994 version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The new legislation emphasizes a strong federal agenda of accountability measures for holding all children to high standards. It raises the stakes around accountability by creating a major assessment component that calls for annual testing of every student in Grades 3-8 in reading, math, and science. Secretary of Education Rod Paige (cited in WGBH Educational Foundation, 2002a) explained the focus on assessment under the No Child Left Behind Act: "We have to know, with some reliable valid source, whether or not students are learning.... That is why the test is necessary: to answer the question, 'Are children learning relative to the standard?'"

Though the legislation will hold states accountable for helping students meet high academic standards, states will be able to determine their own standards and develop their own testing instruments. The notion that states can determine their course of action, as long as they are held accountable for

results, is not a new concept (Elmore, 2002). What is new is the high level of state accountability for creating standards and evaluating students against those standards.

Embracing the effort to leave no child behind is not a point of contention for most educators. The challenge is to meet the expectations of the No Child Left Behind legislation in a timely and meaningful way. Patricia Albjerg Graham, professor of the history of American education at Harvard University, points out that creating change in schools is a formidable task:

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American schools in the 20th century resemble the battleships of World War II. Large, powerful, cumbersome, with enormous crews.... Maneuverability is not their strength. When ordered to change course, they do so, but there are significant delays. The bigger the change in direction, the longer it takes for the ship to achieve the new course. (cited in Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2002)

The challenge for local education leaders is to maneuver as skillfully and expeditiously as possible, given the course that has been outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act.

From High-Stakes Testing to Assessment for School Improvement



Although accountability for test scores may serve as a catalyst for change by focusing the spotlight on academic success and failure, it provides no substantial inputs into the system. Testing is primarily an outcome-measuring device. Test scores alone are not a sufficient motivator of change. They merely highlight the need for a process that can take the raw data that is collected, analyze it, use that data to inform decision making, and redirect resources to address areas of need. In effect, high-stakes tests are simply one tool that must be supplemented with a variety of inputs that are necessary for continuous school improvement.

A primary role for local education leaders in preparing for and responding to the culture of high-stakes testing is to “prime the pump.” A district or school must have in place the capacity to respond to increasing calls for external accountability. Without a vision for long-term capacity building to move from a single focus on high-stakes testing to a culture of assessment for school improvement, test scores alone will do little to influence changes in instruction, practice, and eventually student performance.

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The following five strategies can help school leaders support the use of assessment to promote successful teaching and learning.

1. *Help everyone in the district or building speak the same language and share the same vision for what it means to be a good school and what accountability looks like.*

The idea of norm sharing is new to many schools. Without shared norms and expectations, it is difficult to steer the ship in one direction or know what to do with the assessment data and what it might indicate.

6 "School personnel must share a coherent, explicit set of norms and expectations about what a good school looks like before they can use signals from the outside to improve student learning," states Richard Elmore (2002), professor of educational leadership at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

District and building staff need to have a shared understanding of the purpose of assessment data and the way it will be used to inform decisions about curriculum and practice. A shared understanding of the alignment of assessment, standards, curriculum, and instruction builds individual confidence in the system and lessens the likelihood of duplicitous instruction and testing in a school and district.



MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Alignment of assessments, curriculum, and standards is an essential component of school improvement. "When assessments are not aligned with each other, the curriculum, or the standards prescribed by the state or district, there is no sense that they are working together to provide an overall picture of student achievement. Effective use of curriculum mapping can help alleviate the confusion," states Cromey (2000, p. 5). "*Curriculum mapping* is the comparison of what is taught in the curriculum to the standards adopted by the school, such as those delineated by the state or district."

NCREL's *Curriculum Mapping* Web site is designed to assist school districts in their efforts to write new mathematics and science curricula. Users can access rich international mathematics and science curriculum maps from top-achieving nations. The Web site is available at www.ncrel.org/currmap/.



2. Invest in teachers in order for them to respond to and implement change.

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A study of schools and their use of assessment data (Cromey & Hanson, 2000) found that schools committed to creating a culture of assessment for school improvement involved teachers heavily in various phases of local assessment work and created time for teachers to regularly meet, plan, and discuss the relationship between the multiple assessments they use. According to Elmore (2002), "You can't improve a school's performance, or the performance of any teacher or student in it, without increasing the investment in teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, and understanding of students. This work can be influenced by an external accountability system, but it cannot be done by that system."

Elmore (2002) adds, "Test-based accountability without substantial investments in capacity—internal accountability and instructional improvement in schools—is unlikely to elicit better performance from low-performing students and schools."

Testing alone cannot create change, but it does leverage the inputs necessary for such change.

In addition to focusing resources on other inputs into the school improvement process and given the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, local educators will be required to provide significant leadership that emphasizes long-term improvements and not just a reaction to testing requirements.

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High-stakes testing alone cannot create change,
but it does leverage the inputs necessary for such change.

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Viewpoints

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3. *Articulate the No Child Left Behind Act's call for annual testing—its purpose, its limitations, its benefits—to building-level staff as well as the community.*

There will be questions, concerns, and confusion regarding the role of and implications for assessment. Local leaders play an important role in clarifying the new legislation for people within and outside the school building. Questions will emerge regarding funding, development and implementation of the annual tests, and accountability measures for the school, teachers, and students.

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Local leaders can help others recognize the advantages that emerge from an annual testing system and the use of assessment to enhance teaching. Educators can pinpoint when students begin to fail, which subgroups of students are failing, and where they are failing. Timely feedback allows educators to help students who need help sooner. Targeted efforts can then be directed at those indicators.

Local leaders can help others recognize the advantages that emerge from an annual testing system.



4. *Develop a school culture that is not only one of compliance with the testing but also one that actively uses assessment data as a valuable formative tool for identifying areas of strength and weakness as well as identifying those students of greatest need.*

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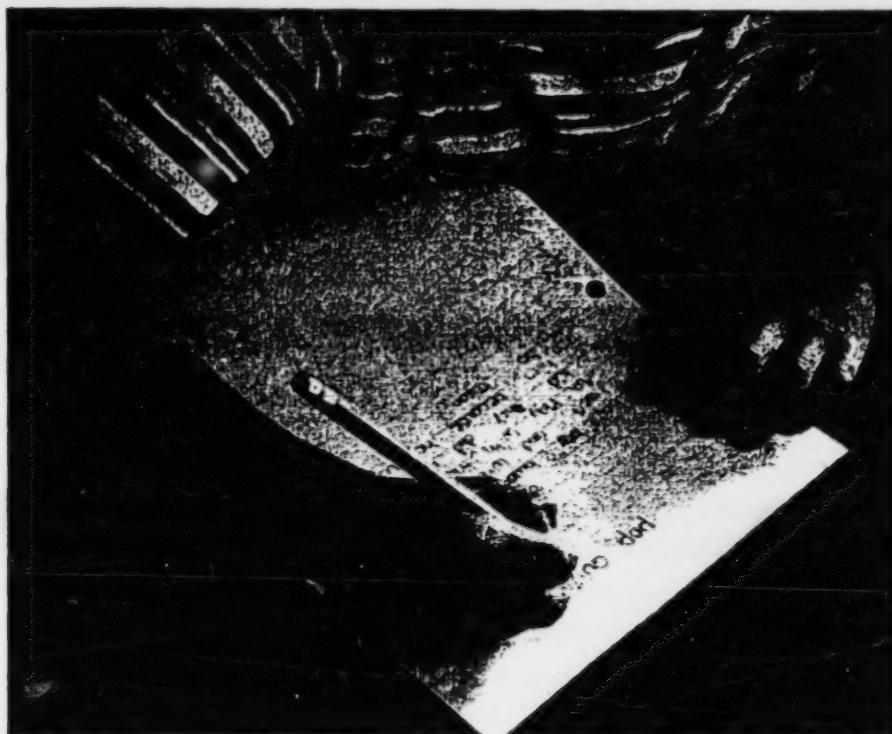
The No Child Left Behind Act requires that assessment data be disaggregated. Most states currently collect state test data for broad groups of students, but very few report out on the individual performance of students, scores for subgroups, or achievement gaps between groups of students (Snow-Renner & Torence, 2002). In addition, most teachers have little experience collecting and using formal data. "Currently, only a few states explicitly require competence in assessment as a condition for being

licensed to teach," notes Rick Stiggins (2002), president of the Assessment Training Institute Foundation. Providing professional development aimed at increasing teachers' knowledge and experience in the use of data is one step that can be taken to improve educational outcomes.

Secretary Paige argues that disaggregated student data is central to truly leaving no child behind. In many schools, it is difficult to determine which students are not doing well until the data is disaggregated past the school average. "For the school to be making progress doesn't tell us enough about what the individual children are doing.... You won't know this until you disaggregate the data, past the average," states Paige. "Now that you know this, you have a responsibility to do something about this" (cited in WGBH Educational Foundation, 2002a).

Professional development to increase teachers knowledge of data can help improve students' educational outcomes.

For local leaders addressing the annual testing component of the No Child Left Behind Act, success will be determined in large part by their ability to view testing in a new light. They need to move from viewing testing as a punitive, disconnected activity for students and schools to thinking of testing as a valuable tool in an assessment system that influences and leverages meaningful change for school improvement.



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LEARNING TO USE AND APPLY DATA

Successful school leaders collect and use data on an ongoing basis to guide their instructional decisions. Classroom teachers embed assessment of student learning into their instruction and adjust their lessons and strategies according to their ongoing learning data. Unfortunately, in-depth, reflective study of data by teams is difficult to carry out during the busy school year.

14 As one solution, NCREL offers Data Retreats—opportunities for district- and school-level leadership teams to analyze school data and develop a data-based plan for school improvement. These two- or three-day retreats lead a team of educators through reflective collaboration and illumination about their school's data. The goal is to develop a clearly focused school improvement strategy that brings about positive results. Setting time aside for a Data Retreat empowers school teams to build their dynamic for focused improvement based on their school's data. The Data Retreat process also models what these teams should take back to their school and carry out on an ongoing basis.

For more information on Data Retreats, contact NCREL at 800-356-2735.

5. *Provide teachers with the tools they need to compile and evaluate the evidence of student progress on a daily basis.*

The most important challenge for teachers, schools, and districts is to support each student's journey toward proficiency in meeting established learning standards. However, extracting information from a student that demonstrates his or her progress toward the goal can be difficult. Ongoing observation of a child at the classroom level—day in and day out—may provide the most accurate information about what a child genuinely knows and what progress is being made. Classroom teachers are most qualified to give input on student progress toward meeting academic standards, but they need to be given the time, the training, and the support to provide more than just test scores. (For information on what one school district has done to address this issue, see “Taking Assessment a Step Further” on page 16.)

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The most important challenge is to support each student's journey toward proficiency in meeting established learning standards.

TAKING ASSESSMENT A STEP FURTHER

Given the value of classroom-level assessment, Douglas County School District in Colorado has taken a proactive approach to creating a culture where frequent and multiple assessments of student progress drive changes in curriculum and instruction.

District administrators there know that true education occurs through a multitude of moment-by-moment decisions made by teachers. Good educational decisions, they believe, can be made only by teachers who have a firm understanding of what their students know today. Because of its faith in "teacher judgments," the Douglas County district is building a system to support good teaching decisions by giving teachers the classroom tools they need to inform themselves.

The district's system is rooted in what the administrators and staff call a *body of evidence*, which is defined as a set of student work that answers the question "What will convince my teacher and others that I am making progress toward or have met the checkpoints associated with a particular content standard?" The body of evidence for each checkpoint includes one or more

required, district-produced assessments, called *anchor assessments*, as well as optional district-produced assessments. It also includes other tests and work the teacher assigns to help gain greater understanding of the student's progress. The anchor assessment is only one piece in a body of evidence, but it is the key to unlocking the state standards and building a system of instructionally useful and ongoing measurements of student progress.

Teachers plan their instruction backward, "unpacking" the complex skills underlying the checkpoints and making them explicit, both to themselves and to their students. By embedding the anchor and other model assessments into instructional planning (the anchor can be given at any point a teacher chooses during the year), teachers build a standards-based instructional year.

Anchor assessments are given in every appropriate class in every school in the district, and so they become the focus of teacher discussions about the nature and quality of student work. Through these discussions, teachers collectively decide on the definitions of districtwide, standards-based achievement and then

compile exemplars of student work to serve as models for both themselves and students. These exemplars provide another means of influence of the standards in daily instruction and feedback.

By allowing teachers—those most knowledgeable about the students—to shape assessments and by providing those teachers with the skills they need, Douglas County School District has taken the need for assessment to a more meaningful level.

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Conclusion

For some, there is great concern that the current emphasis on testing has gone too far and overlooks the fundamentals of what quality education should be. In short, there is a belief that testing is driving the education system. Bob Schwartz, president of Achieve Inc., a nonprofit organization created to promote standards-based education reform, says, "The common denominator in good schools is that people are mindful of the tests. They know there are tests out there, but that's not what they're focused on. They're focused on high-quality instruction for all kids, based on a rich, challenging curriculum, ideally aligned with standards" (cited in WGBH Educational Foundation, 2002a).

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The new legislation makes it even more necessary for educators to recognize that annual testing is a tool or a device for leveraging and promoting meaningful change. A system of assessment is not an education system by itself. Rather, education leaders must see assessment as a means to chart a more clearly defined path for reform.

By understanding the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act as well as the shift from the notion of annual testing as a punitive act to assessment as a catalyst for school improvement, educators will be better able to engage in the task of providing all students with a high-quality education.

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